

Post Office (Old Post Office)
355 North Boulevard
Baton Rouge
East Baton Rouge Parish
Louisiana

HABS No. LA-1131

HABS
LA,
17-BATRO,
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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20243

POST OFFICE
(Old Post Office)

Location: 355 North Boulevard, corner of Fourth Street, Baton Rouge, East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana.

Present Owner: City National Bank.

Present Occupant: City Club of Baton Rouge, Inc.

Present Use: Private Club.

Significance: The Post Office is an outstanding local example of eclectic architecture, with the Italian Renaissance influence evident in the light Florentine arches, window hoods and colonettes. In addition, the building, which served as the city's post office and federal courthouse (1895-1933) and then as the City Hall (1933-1956), was a significant government building for the city.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of Erection: ca. 1894-1897. The year 1894 is carved in the frieze above the porch. The building was occupied February 1, 1897.
2. Architect: None known.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The legal description is located in the East Baton Rouge Parish Centroplex.

"That certain tract or parcel of ground, located in the City of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, together with all buildings and improvements thereon, measuring one hundred forty (140) feet front on the North side of North Boulevard by a depth between parallel lines of one hundred forty (140) feet, and being composed of the

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East Twelve (12) feet of Lot Six (6), the South Twelve (12) feet of Lot Nine (9) and all of Lots Seven (7) and Eight (8), Square Three (3) or One Hundred Thirteen (113), Gilbert Leonard Town, all as shown according to the official plat of the City of Baton Rouge recorded in the Office of the Clerk and Recorder of the Parish of East Baton Rouge; said lots together forming a square of one hundred forty (140) feet, and being located at the Northwest corner of the intersection of North Fourth Street and North Boulevard, in the City of Baton Rouge."

On October 8, 1892, the Federal government purchased the site of the Post Office from Dr. Jean Bertrand Duchain for \$14,500.

In 1933, when the Post Office was moved to a new building of Florida Street, the city government obtained the Old Post Office in exchange for the city-owned property where the new Post Office on Florida Street is located.

In 1957, the building was leased to the city National Bank, who, in turn, subleased it to the City Club of Baton Rouge, Inc.

4. Contractor: None known. The Post Office cost in excess of \$100,000.
5. Original plans: The following article describing the original building appeared in The Baton Rouge Daily Advocate, February 25, 1897.

The citizens of Baton Rouge are proud of their new public building, for since finished it is one of the handsomest structures in the city. The erection of such a building cost many thousand dollars, and such an outlay of money by the government is a fair indication of the rapid increase of the post office business here. So cramped were the officials who managed the business of the government

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in the old building for room that their services which [were] splendid, notwithstanding, [were] hampered to considerable extent.

On Feb. 1st all of the officials of Uncle Sam moved into their new quarters, and the public [has] every reason for congratulation, for the services rendered therein by Postmaster Blouin [are] unequalled anywhere. Not an improvement that is known to modern architecture has been omitted and as an ornament to Boulevard street the structure has no equal.

The building [which] is three stories high occupies the lot at the corner of Boulevard and Church streets. The entire building is built of pressed yellow brick and is fireproof throughout. The entrance to the building is on Boulevard street.

The first floor is the post office and presents a beautiful appearance.

The second floor is devoted to the United States Court. Up there the floor has been sub-divided into rooms for the different officials. The court room has an elegant carpet on the floor, and elegant desks and furniture, and presents one of the neatest and best appointed court rooms in the country.

The third floor is furnished with rooms for witnesses who have been summoned to testify in the court.

The building receives its light from large arched windows.

Elaborate marble finished toilet rooms are distributed throughout the building at convenient points.

Every modern feature, or up-to-date furniture known to the government is in this establishment, and everything is the latest.

6. Alterations and additions:

The building underwent a major renovation in 1935 while serving as the City Hall. Details are not available.

In 1957, when the building was leased to the City Club, the interior was extensively remodeled with the installation of restaurant facilities. Probably at about the same time a modern addition was built onto the rear of the building.

The only room which remains intact from the original Post Office is the Courtroom, now the main dining room.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

Ca. 1910, a reception was held for President William Howard Taft in the lobby of the Post Office when he made a visit to the City. President Taft was travelling down the Mississippi River to New Orleans with a group of people that included Louisiana's governor, J.Y. Sanders.

C. Bibliography

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Conveyance Records, East Baton Rouge Parish Centroplex.

2. Secondary and published sources:

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Prepared by John Easterly
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Historic American
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Summer, 1978

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Post Office is the only example of the late nineteenth century Renaissance Revival style of architecture in the City of Baton Rouge. The fenestration, entablatures and other features are brilliantly ornamented with superficial decoration of a type which became fashionable in Italy about the middle of the sixteenth century.

This ornamentation, along with the late Renaissance roof balustrade and grand flight of approach steps, is used in combination with an early Renaissance arcade on the second floor with fragile arches springing from the capitals of thin columns.

2. Condition of fabric: Excellent.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The building has a 90 foot facade and is 52 feet deep, along with a new rear wing 33 feet deep. There is also a 20 foot staircase and front porch. There are seven bays across the front with three bays on the side. The building is two stories above a raised basement with a third story incorporated into the entablature.
2. Foundations: Heavy masonry.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: The building is constructed of yellow brick with limestone and terra cotta detail.
4. Structural system, framing: Load bearing masonry walls.
5. Porches: The main entrance is approached via nine granite-faced steps between brass railings in limestone bases. The porch has four limestone Ionic columns set between two brick piers, which have limestone capitals ornamented with anthemion motifs. The porch has a limestone architrave and a brick frieze, which has limestone medallions with the building's date, 1894, in Roman numerals. The four-layer cornice consists of dentils, egg and dart motifs, Vitruvian scroll and Greek key. The lateral ends of the porch have wrought iron screens with garland decorations.

The second floor has a corresponding five bay porch, but instead of protruding, it is recessed in the front wall of the building.

The porch has five fragile limestone arches which spring directly from the capitals of six attenuated Corinthian columns. The voussoirs of these arches are ornamented with a central keystone, scallops and acanthus leaves.

6. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance is a five part arcade which contains four windows and a central modern glass door. Executed in what appears to be terra cotta, the arcade consists of fluted and reeded piers with egg and dart ornamented arches, which have circular medallions between.
- b. Windows: The ground floor windows are cleanly cut into the brickwork without ornamentation. The second floor windows are larger and richly ornamented in terra cotta. The front windows, which flank the second floor porch, are framed in full aedicule motifs with bay leaf garland pulvinated friezes on Corinthian pilasters with Guilloche infill ornamentation. Each egg and dart cornice is surmounted by a perched eagle within a wreath with flanking cornucopia.

The second floor side windows are framed in acanthus leaf ornamented molding with beading. The windows are surmounted by large pediments, without friezes, which take the shape of equilateral triangles. These pediments have a central crest or plant form surrounded by foliage.

The rear of the building has a second story rear arcade of five bays, which corresponds to the five bay second story arcade porch on the front; however, the rear arcade is not ornamented and it has no recessed porch, being merely a band of windows.

The windows of the third story are set within the main entablature of the building, the front being circular, the rear and sides being rectangular.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The flat roof is covered with tar and gravel.
- b. Cornice, eaves: The building is surmounted by a full entablature with windows in the frieze set between terra cotta panels of swirling foliage. The frieze is in turn surmounted by a terra cotta modillion cornice which supports a red tile skirting roof. The skirting roof is in turn surmounted by a terra cotta balustrade with a great central cartouche decorated with the stars and stripes.

C. Description of Interior:

The interior of the building has been extensively remodeled several times. The first floor consists of a large dining room on the south side, with modern panelling, a rear kitchen and a central entrance lobby. The remainder of the ground floor consists of three private dining rooms, restrooms and a staircase with corresponding corridors.

There is only one space which still conveys the late nineteenth century Renaissance Revival character. This is the old courtroom on the second floor, a two-storied partially panelled room which is lit by the front and rear arcades. The front arcade porch which has a cast iron ceiling with cartouches appears to be the only original ceiling. Flanking the courtroom are service areas given to food preparation and restrooms.

The partial third floor contains health club facilities and offices.

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D. Site and Surroundings:

The Post Office faces North Boulevard, a divided main road with landscaping in the median. The building is set on the edge of the main downtown commercial area of Baton Rouge. It probably never had any landscaping whatsoever.

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Historic American Buildings
Survey
Summer 1978

ADDENDUM TO
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